

by ***Jonathan Stanfield***

Every summer we have a big outreach on the Isle of Man. We rent a big tent seating four hundred people and over five days we hit the streets with the Gospel. In the evening hundreds of people gather in the tent which is pitched in a park in the centre of Douglas. The evenings are full of praise, testimony, the Gospel and healing. After five days of full-on engagement the tent is dismantled. With all the summer warmth, sunshine and rain you can clearly see where the tent has been. In fact much of the grass under it has grown far more quickly than the field around it. The tent has acted like a greenhouse. But within a few weeks where once there was so much Kingdom activity there is almost no physical sign that anything ever took place and the grass is back to normal.

It's a picture of how we can busy ourselves with so many good, 'spiritual' things in the kingdom, but the life-span of the impact of all this expended energy can be so disheartening if we have not invested our time and our resources in the right cause. So how do we make sure we are not wasting our time?

Well, first of all we need to take our cue from Jesus and his ministry. Jesus said that he was going to 'build his church' (Matthew 16:18). His language should be our language and it should frame all of our ministry in the kingdom. His intention was to bless through 'building'. The book of Acts describes in detail how Jesus established his church by the power of the Holy Spirit and we read Paul later describing himself as a "master builder" (1 Corinthians 3:10). In the example of Paul's life we see how he poured out his life in caring for and nurturing the church. This is a challenge to each one of us - when I exercise my gifts, when I invest my time and resources to bless others, am I doing it in a way which builds the church of Jesus?

You may ask, 'What is the difference between 'blessing' and 'building'?' The answer is that builders start with a plan - a vision of the end in mind. They are strategic. As a local church we may have people and teams coming into our churches and there can be a lot of godly activity, and that's not wrong in itself, but often it doesn't build upon the foundations that have been laid. In fact there are no foundations, just another speaker, another once-off event, a good idea but with no real strategic purpose. The 'building' which Jesus had in mind is harder work but it lasts far longer.

Maybe you are familiar with the story of Nehemiah. He wasn't an apostle in the New Testament sense but he was a builder and he was sent by God to rebuild Jerusalem. I will be referencing some of his story as we pick out some helpful counsel on how to build well.

### **Welcome an external perspective**

In the story of Nehemiah, the remnant of Israel living in Jerusalem had lived with broken down walls for some time and nothing had changed. But when the word reached Nehemiah there was a grace on his life to change it.

I remember a pastor telling me about a homeless lady living in London who died. She was buried by his church and, surprisingly, rather than just a few down and outs attending, a big crowd gathered for her funeral. Some from as far away as Australia! It turned out that this 'poor' lady had inherited several million pounds a few years earlier and these long lost relatives were hoping to benefit from her estate. Yet despite all her wealth she didn't want to leave the rubbish and filth of the streets. She was a millionaire living the life of a tramp.

It's not just homeless people who can be comfortable in their brokenness. Any Christian can be in a situation so long that they start to think of their situation as normal - lack of passion for Jesus, disunity, lack of love for the saints, shrinking churches, lack of passion for the Gospel. As individuals we need an external perspective into our lives in order for us to grow into more of God and to ensure that the things which we are busy with are works that will last.

As a local church this is also true. We need to have the courage to ask, "Will you share with me where you think I am broken? What one area do you think I need to seriously give attention to over the next year?" There are areas where we all lack. The problem for most of us is "You don't know what you don't know!" As we actively disciple others and welcome this kind of shaping in our own lives, we become more like Jesus and *that* is what true building is all about.

### **Always think team**

*"When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail." (Nehemiah 4:15-17)*

As a child on Saturday nights I used to love to watch all the old Hammer House of horror movies and other "B" horror movies. There's a classic one called "the Hand". This hand has become detached from a body, it's been exposed to radiation and it has a life of its own. It's very scary! The front door bell rings, and the unsuspecting victim opens up the door and within seconds the hand is around her throat choking her to death. There's only one problem. The hand is dead! It doesn't work that way.

Since we are called to reflect Christ as a fully functional body and not as a single hand doing wonderful things (even one exposed to radiation!), when we work in team we demonstrate the true nature of Christ. Building church means building team. Just as every saint needs to be connected to the body - the local church, every local church needs to be properly connected to the Ephesians 4:11 gifts which Christ has given. We read that even Jesus worked with the Seventy, the Twelve, and then the Three. Paul worked in team with about forty people! Four12 is about team and not just the Four12 gifts. The saints in the churches *are* the team, so we want to see the saints empowered to do the ministry.

### **Building is a process not an event**

Nehemiah learned just how quickly things can go wrong in the church when he made a brief trip to

Babylon. A guy called Eliashib organized a chamber for his friend Tobiah to live in, inside the temple! (Nehemiah 13:4-7)

I remember reading a news story about an arctic team and they started to have problems with their GPS because although they were walking north they were actually further south than the day before. The GPS was 100% accurate. What they discovered was that they were walking on an ice flow which was travelling faster in the opposite direction!

Our reality is that right up until the moment that Jesus returns for his pure, spotless and holy bride we are going to need changing, tweaking and realigning with the blueprint of heaven. We may start well on our journey of faith but we will inevitably begin to stray off the path. We rely on each other to straighten us up! In life we never drift into more of our destiny. It's intentional and we need to be aware that culture around us is moving so fast that we must stay on the front foot!

I believe that as a Four12 movement God is moving us away from the 'pop up tent' model of ministry to one where we are digging hard to establish good, firm and healthy foundations and establishing ministry with lasting fruit. It may be that God requires you now to repent from being unwilling to ask for true external perspective. Maybe you have been building around yourself rather than team? It is possible that you have not even begun to think of the kingdom of Christ in terms of 'building the church' and the Lord is challenging you to value what he is doing in and through his church and calling you to join this mission. As we align our hearts with Christ we trust for miraculous restoration, as Nehemiah saw, and that the body of Christ will thrive and grow despite the opposition. After all, Jesus said even the very "gates of hell" would not overcome his church, built on the foundation of Christ.



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jonathan serves at [Living Hope Community Church](#), a five congregation church on the Isle of Man. He's married to Annette with four daughters and has a passion to see the saints equipped to fulfil their calling in Christ Jesus. You can follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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